DNB311 ID Studio 7: Capstone

RESEARCH REPORT

Improving Emotional Support for Pet Owners Following Companion Animal Loss through Memorialisation and Product Design

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Word count:4564



Authenticity Statement

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this report is my own work. This report has not been submitted for any subject or for other purposes. I certify that the intellectual content of this report is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this report and sources have been acknowledged.

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Date: 13/09/2026

AI Use Statement

I have utilised Generative AI in this report (including ChatGPT) to assist in various ways. The way I have used AI includes synthesising data and information from my findings and from the literature. AI has been used throughout this project to help ensure the information provided is accurate and to reduce word count. ChatGPT was also used to assist in organising interview transcripts from audio recordings and translating them from Chinese into English. Grammarly was used to check grammatical accuracy.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Companion animals occupy an increasingly significant role within Australian households, providing companionship, emotional support and a sense of connection within everyday life. In 2025, Australia had an estimated 31.6 million pets across 7.7 million pet-owning households, representing 73% of all households. Furthermore, 86% of Australian pet owners reported that their pets had a positive impact on their lives (Animal Medicines Australia [AMA], 2025). As companion animals become increasingly integrated into family relationships, domestic environments and everyday routines, their death can represent the loss of an important emotional relationship and a familiar part of everyday life.

Pet bereavement research has identified grief, guilt, disrupted routines and difficulties adjusting after companion-animal loss. A systematic review by Cleary et al. (2022) found that the experience extends beyond immediate sadness, involving the owner–pet relationship, grief, guilt, available support and the owner's future after the loss. At the same time, remembrance practices such as preserving mementoes, photographs and personal belongings may allow owners to maintain an emotional connection with a deceased pet.

The aim of this project is to investigate the emotional experiences, behaviours and memorial practices of adults following the loss of a domestic companion animal and to explore how design may support meaningful remembrance within everyday home life. Secondary research, product benchmarking, surveys and semi-structured interviews will be used to identify emotional pain points, existing coping and memorial practices, and opportunities for a sensitive and human-centred design response.

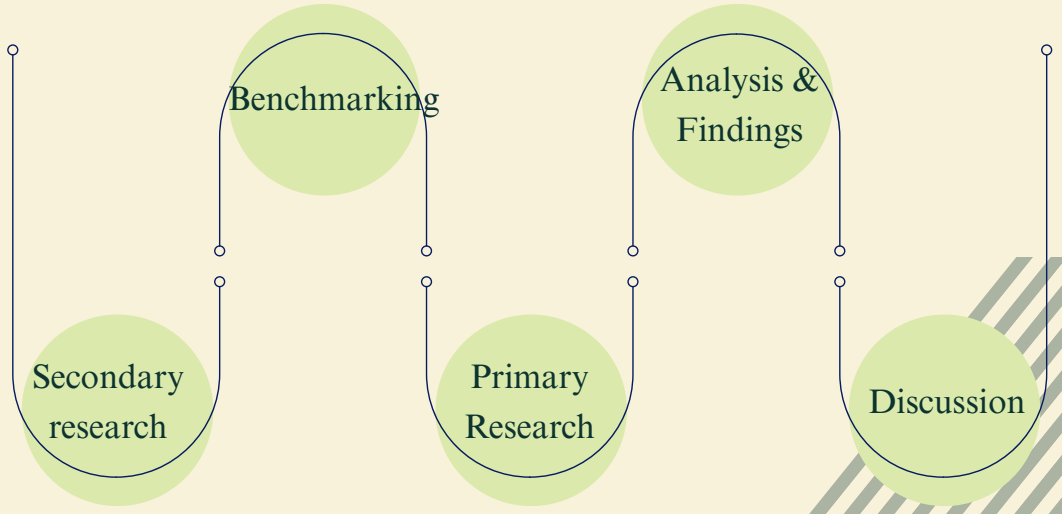


Figure 1. Overall Structure of Research Report (Source: Author, 2026)

1.2 Background

This section reviews current research surrounding the human–pet relationship, the experience of companion animal loss, and the ways people remember their pets after death. Understanding these areas helps establish why pet bereavement deserves greater attention and how design may contribute to more meaningful forms of remembrance.

The Human-Pet Relationship

Companion animals are an integral part of Australians' daily lives. In 2025, 73% of Australian households had at least one pet, and 86% of pet owners reported that their pets had a positive impact on their lives (Australian Animal Medicines Association, 2025). This relationship is typically built through companionship, care, shared daily routines, and long-term cohabitation. Consequently, the passing of a pet signifies the loss of a familiar presence in the home and the severing of an important emotional bond.

An Australian study comparing grief reactions following the death of a human loved one and a companion animal confirmed the importance of this emotional bond; there was no significant difference in the level of grief between the two groups, highlighting that pet loss can be experienced as a deeply meaningful bereavement (Lavorgna & Hutton, 2019).

Pet loss can bring a range of emotional challenges, including sadness, loneliness, guilt, and a strong sense of absence. A systematic review by Cleary et al. (2022) identified five recurring themes in pet bereavement experiences: relationship, grief, guilt, support, and the future. The shorter lifespan of companion animals also means that owners often face the possibility of loss within the relationship, making grief an important part of understanding the human–pet bond.



For some owners, this grief may also become disenfranchised grief, where the loss is not fully recognised or understood by others. Pet grief can be deeply personal, and people without a similar relationship or experience may find it difficult to understand the emotional significance of the loss. This can leave owners feeling that their grief is difficult to express, explain, or validate. Australian research involving bereaved pet owners found that disenfranchised grief can become particularly challenging when grief is already severe, highlighting the importance of recognition and emotional support following pet loss (Spain et al., 2019).

1.2 Background

MEMORIALISATION

After a pet dies, many owners continue the relationship through memories, photographs, possessions, rituals and memorial objects. This is commonly discussed through the concept of continuing bonds, where a connection with the deceased continues through remembrance and meaningful practices.

Current research suggests that continuing bonds are highly personal. They may provide comfort and support for some owners, while certain forms of continuing connection may intensify grief for others. This means there is no single memorial practice that is suitable for everyone (Hughes & Harkin, 2025). Research into pet memorialisation also shows considerable variation in how owners choose to remember their animals, reinforcing the importance of personal choice in the grieving process (Kogan et al., 2024).

SUMMARY

Current research shows that pet loss can carry significant emotional meaning, while grief experiences and remembrance practices vary greatly between individuals. These findings suggest an opportunity for design to explore personal, sensitive and flexible forms of memorialisation that support remembrance and continuing connection within everyday life.

73%

OF AUSTRALIAN HOMES

have a pet

62.8%

received INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT

following pet loss

78.9%

interested in

NEW WAYS TO MEMORIALISE

their pet

1.3 Benchmarking

Benchmarking was used to examine existing pet memorial products currently available within the market and to understand how different products approach remembrance after companion-animal loss. Benchmarking in product development involves comparing existing products, competitors or established practices to understand current performance and what is already achievable within a product category (Ettlie & Johnson, 1994).

Seven products were selected to represent different approaches to pet memorialisation, including ashes storage, digital remembrance, candle-based memorials, paw-print preservation, fur preservation, symbolic memorial objects and outdoor memorial plaques. The selected products provide a cross-section of physical, digital, indoor and outdoor memorial solutions currently available.

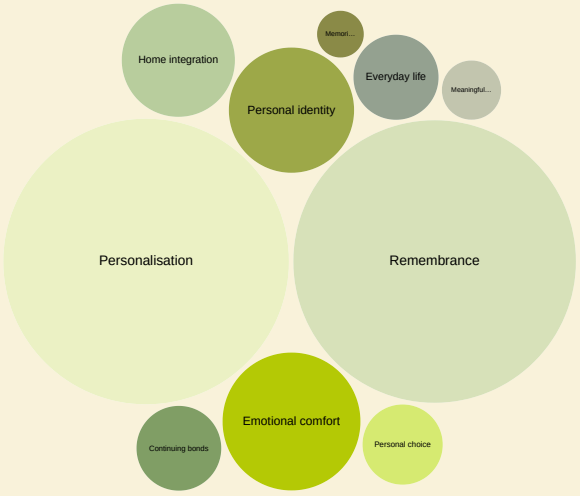
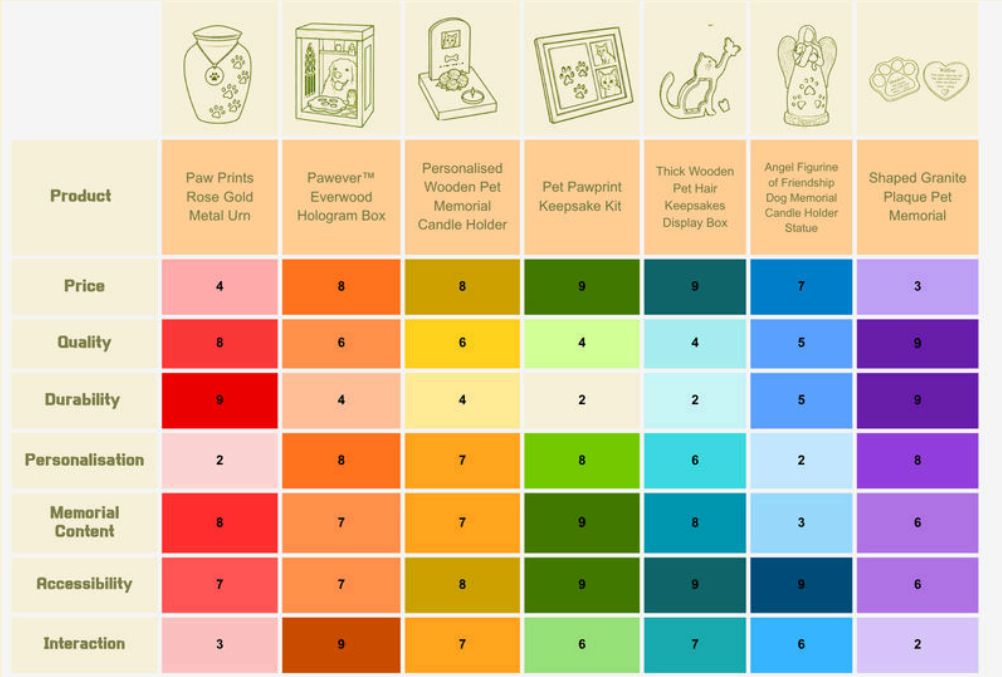


Figure 2. Key Word for Benchmarking



Product	Paw Prints Rose Gold Metal Urn	Pawever™ Everwood Hologram Box	Personalised Wooden Pet Memorial Candle Holder	Pet Pawprint Keepsake Kit	Thick Wooden Pet Hair Keepsakes Display Box	Angel Figurine of Friendship Dog Memorial Candle Holder Statue	Shaped Granite Plaque Pet Memorial
Price	4	8	8	9	9	7	3
Quality	8	6	6	4	4	5	9
Durability	9	4	4	2	2	5	9
Personalisation	2	8	7	8	6	2	8
Memorial Content	8	7	7	9	8	3	6
Accessibility	7	7	8	9	9	9	6
Interaction	3	9	7	6	7	6	2

Figure 3. Comparative Table of seven existing pet memorial products (Source: Author, 2026)

Figure 3 compares a range of existing pet memorial products using a 10-point rating scale, considering factors such as price, quality, durability, personalisation, memorial content, accessibility and interaction. Ratings are based on product pages, descriptions, specifications, and existing customer reviews. Price, quality, durability, and ease of use are considered when the price is reasonable, the product quality is satisfactory, and there is expected longevity and ease of purchase. Personalisation and memorial content examine how each design represents the individual pet and incorporates meaningful traces such as ashes, fur, photographs, paw prints, names or personal messages. Interactivity assesses the extent to which owners can actively interact with the keepsake product by viewing, touching, opening, lighting up, or accessing stored memories.

1.3 Benchmarking

Paw Prints Rose Gold Metal Urn
Price: 170 AUD
This compact metal urn is designed to preserve a pet's ashes after cremation. The rose-gold paw-print details and personalised name tag create a clear connection to the individual pet, while its small size allows it to be displayed within the home.

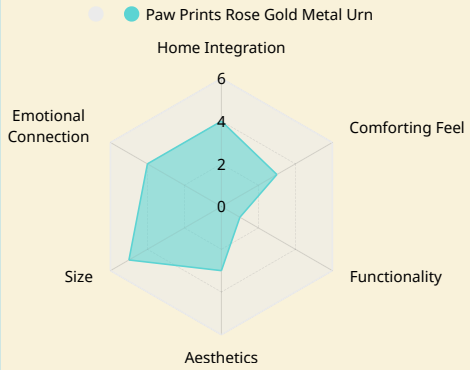


Figure 4. Paw Prints Rose Gold Metal Urn evaluation (Source: Author, 2026).

Pawever™ Everwood Hologram Box
Price: 59.90 AUD
This wooden memorial display uses a pet image to create a digital hologram-style representation. The visual display provides a more active way of revisiting memories and adds an interactive element to a traditional memorial object.

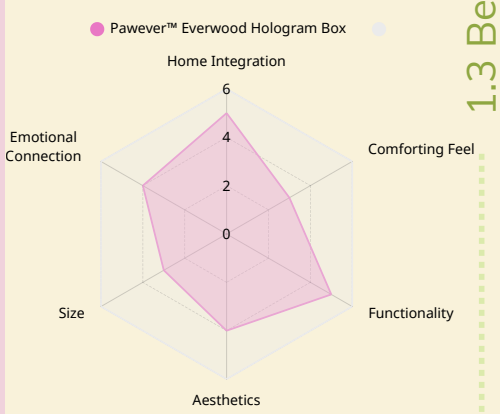


Figure 5. Pawever™ Everwood Hologram Box evaluation (Source: Author, 2026).

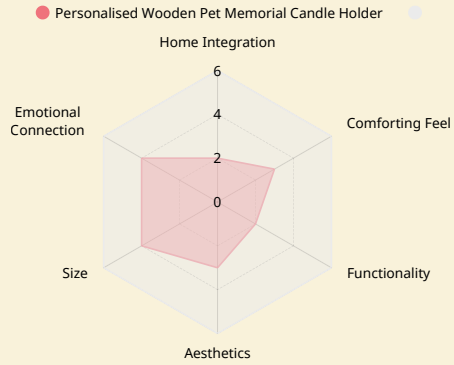


Figure 6. Personalised Wooden Pet Memorial Candle Holder evaluation (Source: Author, 2026).

Personalised Wooden Pet Memorial Candle Holder
Price: 50.36 AUD
This memorial combines a photograph, engraved pet details, flowers and candle lighting to create a personalised remembrance display. Its upright, tombstone-like form gives the product a strong memorial appearance, which may feel visually heavy or closely associated with death when placed within an everyday home environment.

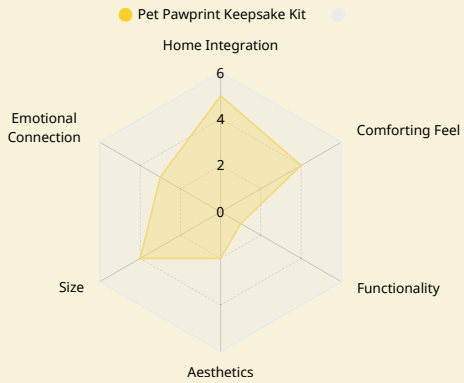


Figure 7. Pet Pawprint Keepsake Kit evaluation (Source: Author, 2026).

Pet Pawprint Keepsake Kit
Price: 30 AUD
This keepsake frame preserves a pet's real paw impressions alongside personal photographs, creating a strong connection to the individual animal. The product is primarily designed for viewing and display, with limited interaction after the paw print has been created. Its emotional value therefore relies heavily on the preserved print and photographs.

1.3 Benchmarking

Thick Wooden Pet Hair Keepsakes Display Box
Price: 21.95 AUD
This wooden keepsake uses the silhouette of a pet with a clear acrylic window positioned within the body, allowing preserved fur to remain visible inside. This creates a meaningful visual relationship between the pet's form and a physical trace that once belonged to them. Its function remains relatively simple, with the experience focused mainly on storing and viewing the fur.

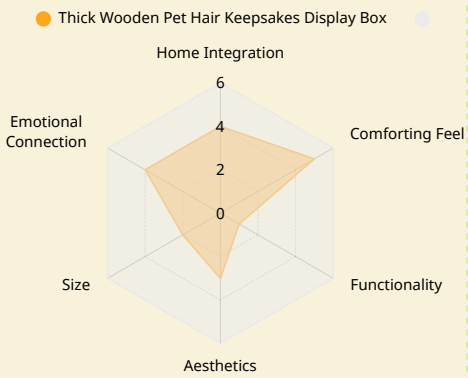


Figure 8. Thick Wooden Pet Hair Keepsakes Display Box evaluation (Source: Author, 2026)..

Angel Figurine of Friendship Dog Memorial Candle Holder Statue
Price: 51.68 AUD
This decorative memorial combines an angel-and-dog figurine with soft candle lighting, creating a gentle and comforting atmosphere. The design is highly symbolic and generic, with limited opportunities to represent the personality, appearance or unique memories of one specific pet.

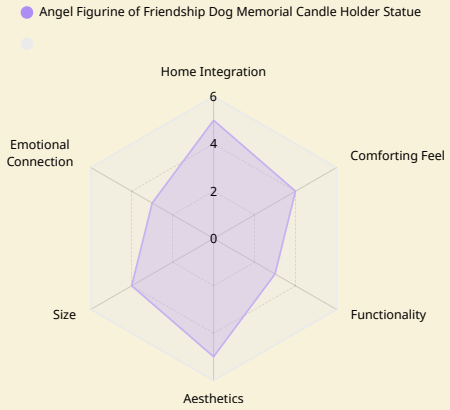


Figure 9. Angel Figurine of Friendship Dog Memorial Candle Holder Statue evaluation (Source: Author, 2026).

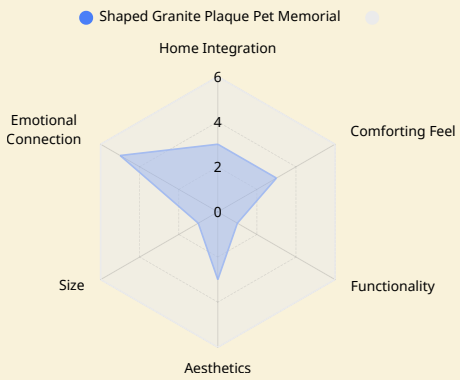


Figure 10. Shaped Granite Plaque Pet Memorial evaluation (Source: Author, 2026).

Shaped Granite Plaque Pet Memorial
Price: AUD 235
This polished granite plaque is durable and can serve as a long-term keepsake and can be personalised. Its paw print or heart design clearly conveys the meaning of the moment, making it ideal for a garden or a dedicated memorial space. Because of its heavy material, permanent design, and primary outdoor orientation.

**Photos of these products can be found in the appendix 1 at the end of the report*

1.3 Benchmarking

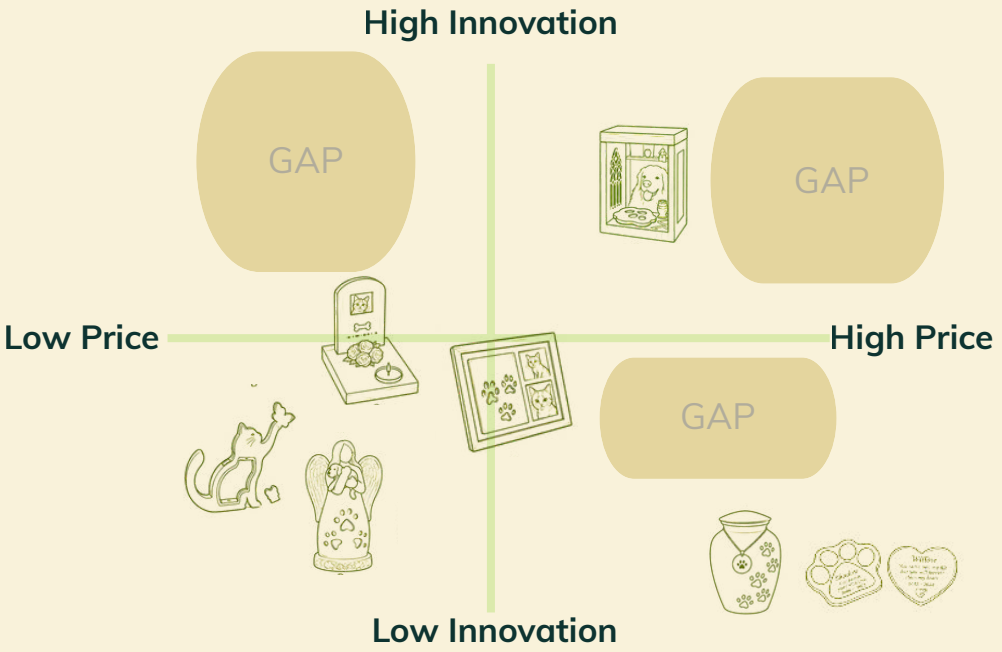


Figure 11. Positioning matrix

Figure 11 compares the seven selected pet memorial products based on their relative market price and level of innovation. Innovation was considered through the product's function, interaction, method of preserving memories, and overall design experience. The matrix shows that several traditional memorial products, including the urn and granite plaque, sit within the higher-price but lower-innovation area. These products provide durability and clear memorial value, although their forms remain closely associated with conventional remembrance. More innovative products, such as the hologram box, introduce new ways of revisiting memories but are less common within the current market. The matrix helps identify how current products are positioned within the market and where opportunities for future development may exist.

OPPORTUNITIES AND GAPS

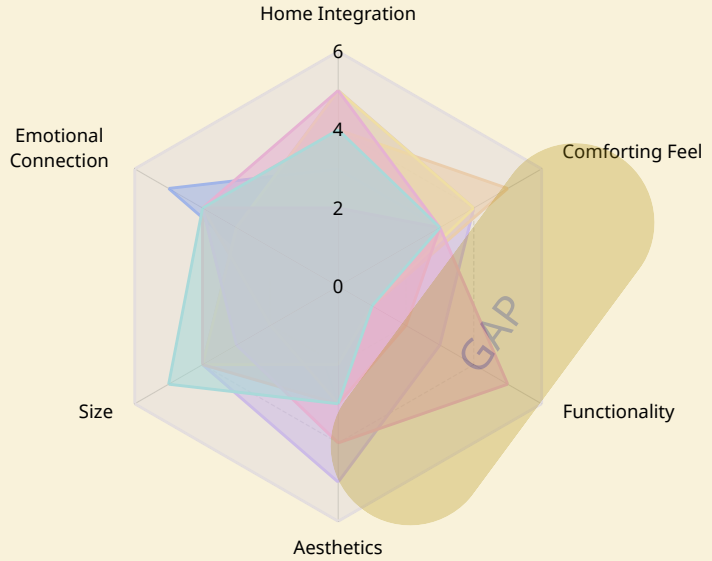


Figure 12. Benchmarking opportunities and gaps (Source: Author, 2026).

Figures 11 and 12 identify two connected gaps within the current pet memorial market. Figure 11 shows that most products remain within the low-to-mid innovation range, with very few options occupying the high-innovation areas, particularly at a lower price. Figure 12 further highlights a gap between comforting feel and functionality, as few products perform strongly in both areas at the same time. Together, these findings suggest an opportunity for a more innovative memorial product that combines practical function with a softer and more comforting experience.

2.0 Research

2.1 Research

OVERVIEW

This section presents the primary research undertaken to explore pet owners' experiences surrounding companion animal loss and memorialisation. The research focuses on how owners experience and respond to loss, the ways they continue to remember their pets, and the qualities they value in memorial products and experiences. Findings are presented through survey data, interview insights, and comparisons across participant responses, providing a focused understanding of the emotional, personal, and practical considerations that shape pet memorialisation.

METHODOLOGY

Method triangulation was used as the overall research approach. Triangulation involves the use of multiple methods or data sources to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a research topic and examine the convergence of information across different sources (Carter et al., 2014).

This research used two primary data collection methods: an online survey with pet owners and two semi-structured interviews with participants who had experienced companion animal loss. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative responses to identify broader patterns in experiences, remembrance practices and memorial preferences, while the interviews provided more detailed personal accounts of loss, memory and ongoing connection.

Findings from both methods were compared across the research to identify recurring patterns and complementary insights, strengthening the overall understanding of pet owners' experiences of loss and memorialisation.



Figure 13. Method triangulation

2.1 Research

METHODS

SURVEY DESIGN

As this study involves animal death and potentially traumatic memories, the survey design places particular emphasis on participants' right to know and voluntary participation. Before the formal start, participants receive a brief introduction outlining the research topic, the general nature of the questions, and their right to stop at any time. A consent form is also included before the formal questionnaire to confirm participants' understanding of the research and their willingness to continue participating.

This online survey is divided into four phases. The first phase aims to understand participants and their pet ownership, asking if participants have ever experienced the death of a pet they were closely associated with. This response guides participants along two distinct paths. Participants who have experienced pet death are asked about pet deaths that were personally significant to them, the most difficult part of their experience, and how they commemorate or remember their pets. This section uses structured single-choice and multiple-choice questions to identify common patterns in the experiences of different participants. The questionnaire also includes two open-ended questions asking participants to describe the most difficult part of their experience. These responses allow participants to describe their experiences in their own words, as each individual's feelings about the death of a pet can be vastly different.

Participants without a history of pet death will be asked about their expected feelings, future ways of commemorating the loss, and items they might wish to keep. Both paths ultimately converge in the final section, exploring commemorative methods, existing products, cherished qualities, and their placement in their homes. The survey uses both single-choice and multiple-choice questions to improve completion efficiency and facilitate comparison of different answers. The entire questionnaire is expected to take 5-10 minutes, and written responses are designed to be concise and clear to allow participants to provide relevant information while avoiding an overly cumbersome questionnaire.

INTERVIEW DESIGN

Semi-structured interviews were designed for participants with lived experience of companion animal loss to gather in-depth qualitative insights. Each interview was designed to last approximately 30 minutes and included seven core questions supported by optional follow-up prompts. The semi-structured format provided a balance between consistency and flexibility, allowing participants to respond to the same key areas while also providing space for deeper exploration of personal experiences (Gill et al., 2008).
The interviews were organised around five areas: the participant’s relationship with their pet, the experience of loss, emotional changes over time, remembrance and memory preservation, and reflections on memorial products or services. As these topics may involve sensitive memories, the research focus was explained at the beginning of each interview, and participants were informed of their right to skip questions, pause, or end the interview at any time.

2.1 Research

Questions began with general conversations about the pet and gradually moved into more emotionally sensitive experiences. Open-ended questions allowed participants to describe significant moments, farewell experiences, meaningful objects, and remembrance practices, while optional follow-up prompts provided flexibility to explore experiences that were personally significant. A final open question allowed participants to share any additional experiences or perspectives relevant to the research.

	survey	interview
Purpose of Survey	To gather a broad understanding of pet owners' experiences and perspectives surrounding pet loss, remembrance and memorialisation. The survey also explored preferences and expectations relating to existing and future pet memorial products to help identify design priorities and opportunities.	To gain in-depth qualitative insights into lived experiences of companion animal loss, including emotional responses, remembrance practices and personal expectations of memorial products or services.
Survey Participants	40 responses were received. One participant did not consent, leaving 39 consented responses. Participants were adults aged 18+ with different pet ownership and pet-loss experiences.	Two participants with direct experience of companion animal loss took part in the semi-structured interviews. Their experiences included childhood dog loss and the sudden loss of a companion cat.
Data Type	The survey included single-choice, multiple-response and open-ended questions, producing both quantitative and qualitative data. Two open-ended questions focused on personal pet-loss experiences.	Qualitative data collected through seven open-ended core questions and optional follow-up questions.
Collection of Data	Data were collected through Google Forms. The survey took approximately 5–10 minutes. See Appendix 2 for the full questionnaire.	Semi-structured interviews of approximately 30 minutes, audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis. See Appendix 4 for the full interview guide.
Research Focus	Questions covered pet ownership and background, previous pet-loss experience, experiences or expectations of loss, remembrance practices, meaningful memories and keepsakes, memorial product preferences, perceived limitations of current products, and placement within the home.	Questions covered five main areas: pet relationship, experience of loss, emotional changes over time, remembrance and memory preservation, and reflections on memorial products or services.

2.2 Analysis&Findings

2.2.1 Survey Results

A total of 40 survey submissions were received, with 39 valid responses included in the analysis after one non-consenting response was excluded. Of these, 20 participants had experienced pet loss and 19 had not. Full survey results are provided in Appendix X.

Survey responses were reviewed and grouped around the themes most relevant to the research question. Selected quantitative questions were analysed through frequencies, percentages and group comparisons, while open-ended responses were coded for recurring themes. Figures 14–19 present the findings that most clearly inform pet-loss experience, remembrance needs, memorial preferences and opportunities for future design.

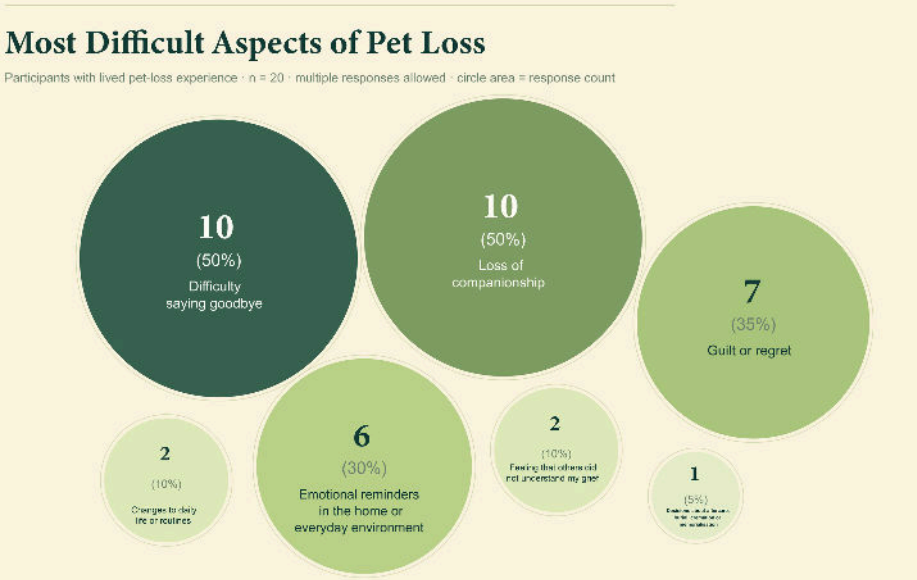


Figure 14. Most difficult aspects of companion animal loss.

According to the survey, when participants with pet-loss experience were asked about the most difficult parts of losing a pet, 50% selected loss of companionship and 50% selected difficulty saying goodbye. Guilt or regret was selected by 35%, while 30% identified emotional reminders in the home or everyday environment as difficult (Figure 14).

These results show that pet loss is closely connected with the loss of everyday companionship. They also suggest that familiar spaces and objects can continue to remind owners of the pet after the loss.

2.2 Analysis&Findings

2.2.1 Survey Results



Figure 15. Stages when grief or sense of loss felt strongest.

When the same participants were asked when their grief or sense of loss felt strongest, 45% selected returning to everyday life without their pet, while 40% selected the time of the loss itself. Farewell or aftercare and later reminders such as anniversaries were each selected by 25% (Figure 15).

The result suggests that grief remains important after the immediate loss. Returning to normal routines and living without the pet can be one of the most difficult stages.

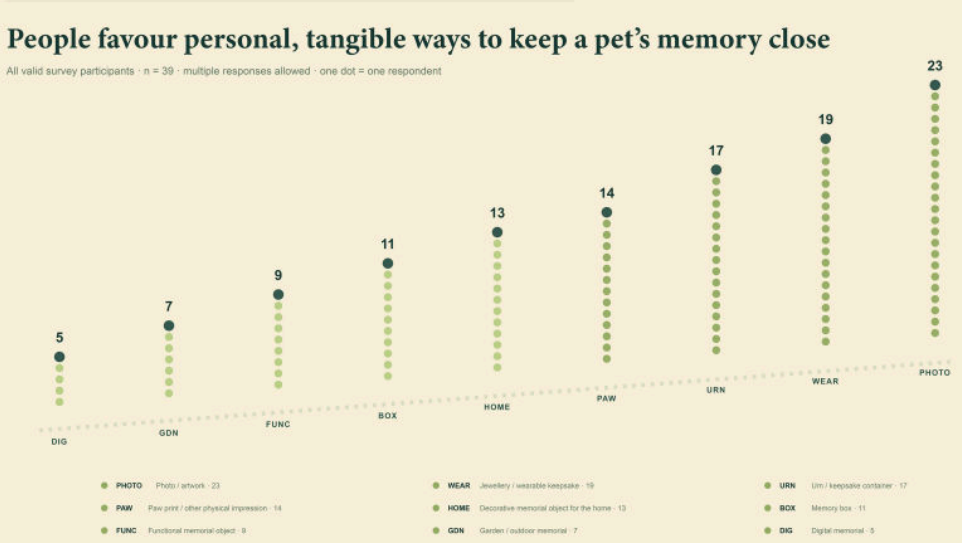


Figure 16. Preferred pet memorial products and approaches.

Figure 16 shifts from the experience of loss to the types of memorial products or approaches participants would personally feel comfortable using. This figure includes all 39 valid participants, allowing preferences to be considered across people both with and without previous pet-loss experience.

Photo or artwork was the most popular option at 59.0%. This was followed by jewellery or wearable keepsakes at 48.7%, urns or keepsake containers at 43.6%, paw prints or physical impressions at 35.9%, and decorative memorial objects for the home at 33.3% (Figure 16).

The stronger responses are mainly physical or visual forms of remembrance. This suggests that participants value memorials that can preserve something recognisable or personally connected to the individual pet.

2.2 Analysis&Findings

2.2.1 Survey Results

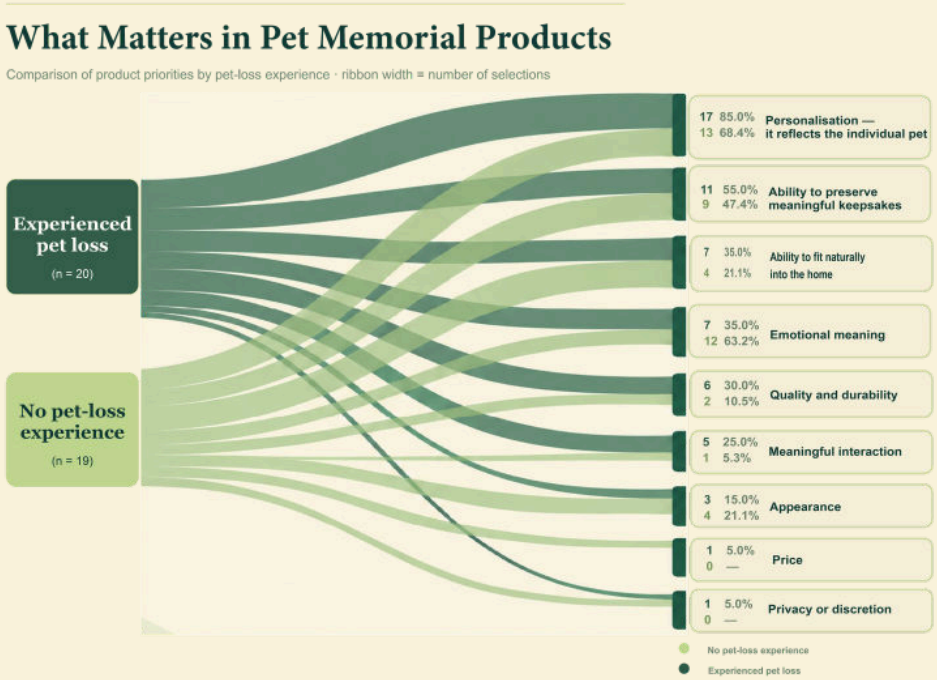


Figure 17. Memorial-product priorities by pet-loss experience.

Figure 17 compares memorial-product priorities between participants who had experienced pet loss and those who had not. Personalisation was the strongest priority in both groups, selected by 85.0% of participants with pet-loss experience and 68.4% of those without. The ability to preserve meaningful keepsakes was also highly valued, selected by 55.0% and 47.4%.

Participants with previous loss experience showed comparatively greater interest in home integration, quality and durability, and meaningful interaction, while participants without previous loss experience selected emotional meaning more frequently. They suggest that direct experience may increase attention to how a memorial is physically kept and used over time.

Across both groups, the strongest common finding is the importance of creating a memorial that reflects the identity of the individual pet and provides a place for personally meaningful memories or keepsakes.

2.2 Analysis&Findings

2.2.1 Survey Results

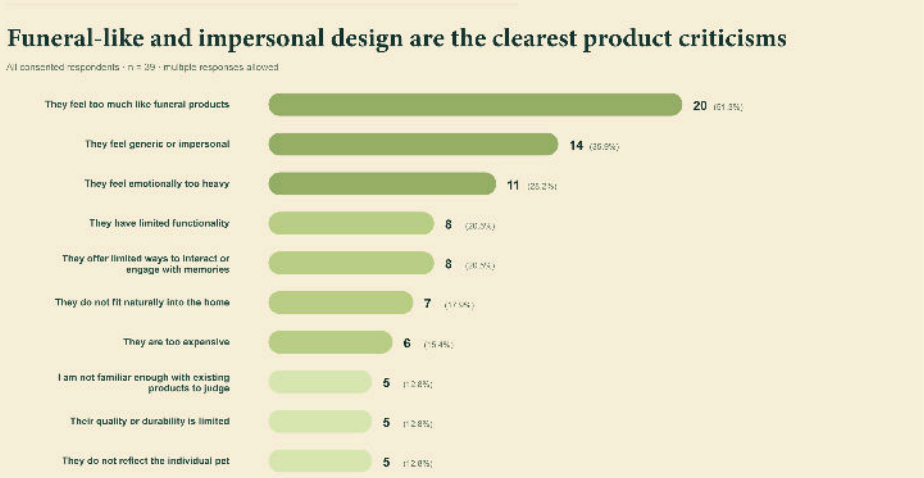


Figure 18. Perceived limitations of existing pet memorial products.

Figure 18 analyses participants' views on current pet memorial products. We compiled the responses from 39 valid participants to identify the most frequently mentioned limitations. When asked about the main limitations of existing pet memorial products, 51.3% of participants felt that these products looked too much like funeral goods. Another 35.9% felt that these products were too generic or lacked personality, while 28.2% felt they were emotionally too heavy.

This finding is particularly important when viewed in combination with Figures 16 and 17. Although participants expressed interest in physical memorial items, many were dissatisfied with the visual appeal and emotional tone of existing products. This suggests a market opportunity for developing memorial products that preserve meaningful commemorative value while presenting a softer, more personalised look that is better suited to a home environment

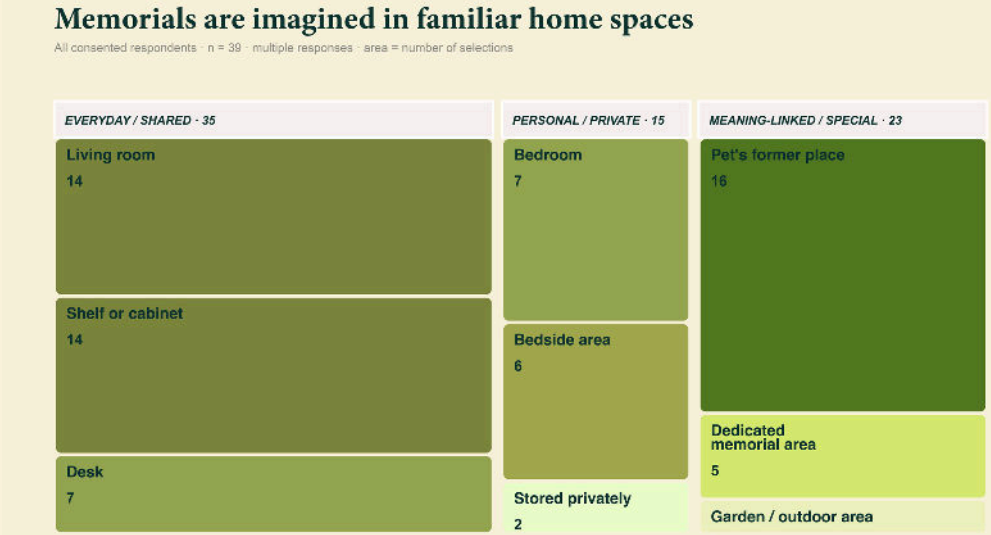


Figure 19. Preferred placement of a pet memorial object within the home.

Figure 19 explores where participants are most likely to place pet mementoes. Responses primarily centred on everyday display spaces, more private areas, and locations with a special connection to the pet.

The most frequently selected location was a place where the pet used to spend a lot of time; 16 participants (41.0%) chose this option. The living room and bookshelves or cabinets were each selected by 14 participants (35.9%). Only a few participants wished to store mementoes privately rather than display them.

The results indicate that people typically envision placing mementoes in spaces already connected to their daily lives. The strong preference for places once associated with their pets also suggests that the significance of these mementoes may stem in part from their relationship to the surrounding environment. This clearly highlights a need for products that are both suitable for long-term display and visually harmonious with the home environment.

2.2 Analysis&Findings

2.2.2 Interview

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants who had experienced companion-animal loss. The main purpose of the interviews was to better understand how pet owners experience loss, remember their pets, and respond to memorial products. Particular attention was also given to individual experiences that revealed needs or opportunities not clearly captured by the survey. Selected quotes were translated from Chinese and lightly edited for clarity without changing their original meaning. Full interview transcripts are provided in Appendix 6.

Participant 1

Former dog owner

Owned three dogs during childhood. The dogs were part of her everyday life from around the end of kindergarten through primary school. One later passed away and two were lost.

Participant 2

Former cat owner

Rescued an ginger cat at around three months old and lived with him for approximately five and a half years. The cat later passed away suddenly due to a heart-related condition.

Absence in Everyday Life

"After he was gone, finding his old food bowl, seeing fur on my clothes or looking at his toys made me realise again that he was no longer there."

"Coming home felt different because there was no dog waiting for me anymore."

"I would see salmon or prawns at the supermarket and automatically think about buying some for him. Then I would suddenly remember that he was no longer there."

Everyday routines make absence visible. Both participants experienced loss through familiar places, objects and habitual actions. The emotional impact was not limited to the moment of death; it continued through ordinary daily life.

2.2 Analysis&Findings

2.2.2 Interview

Farewell, Finality and Regret

"The hardest moment was when I saw him lying there and realised that he had really gone."

"Everything happened very suddenly. Looking back, I wish I could have given him a better farewell."

The quality of the farewell can remain meaningful after the loss. Sudden loss can leave owners with little time to emotionally prepare or decide how they want to say goodbye. An incomplete farewell may contribute to later feelings of regret.

Personal Traces and Individual Identity

"People might think dogs of the same breed look the same, but they really don't. Every dog has different features."
"It needs to have some connection to my own dog, such as their fur, their voice or something that belongs to them."

"The memorial I bought did not really have anything that represented my cat, so I placed the wool-felt figure of him with it."

Recognition creates personal meaning. The two participants were discussing details about mementoes belonging to a specific pet. Hair, appearance, paw prints, sounds, and personal items all carry deeper personal significance.

2.2 Analysis&Findings

2.2.2 Interview

Memorials Within Everyday Home Life

"I would probably display the drawings on a desk, bookshelf or near the television."

"I keep it on top of the cabinet. I pass that place every day before I leave the house, and having it there makes me feel more comforted."

Mementoes can become part of everyday life. The participants all felt that it was more comforting to display mementoes in a prominent place rather than hide them away. For Participant 2, mementoes also became part of the small, recurring acts of remembrance in daily life.

Memory Changes Over Time

"After more than ten years, some of the memories are not as clear anymore. But when something reminds me of them, those feelings can suddenly come back."
"When I see the drawings now, I think about the happy times with them first. I don't immediately think about their death."

Grief may become less intense, while specific memories can also become less clear. Physical memorials and personal traces can help bring those memories back.

Memorial as a Symbolic Home

"I chose something shaped like a small house. When he was alive, I always wanted to give him a better living environment, so it felt like a place for him."

A memorial form can represent a place as well as an object.

2.2 Analysis&Findings

2.2.2 Interview

Practical Preservation Matters

"I later realised there was a moisture problem with the ashes, so I had to dry and protect them again."

Memorial objects may contain irreplaceable materials such as ashes, fur or other keepsakes. Secure storage, moisture protection, durability and long-term preservation should be considered alongside emotional meaning.

Gentle Interaction

"Maybe if I called my dog's name, the memorial could recognise it and play a sound of my dog."

This participant was interested in a memorial that provides a small response connected to the pet. Light, sound, touch or other gentle feedback could be explored as forms of meaningful interaction.

3.0 Discussion

3.1 Discussion

Research Findings

Section 1.2 highlights that companion animals are typically closely tied to family relationships, daily life, and the home environment. Previous research has also shown that the death of a pet can trigger grief, guilt, and difficulty adjusting to the pain of losing a familiar companion (Cleary et al., 2022). People may memorialise departed pets through photographs, mementoes, rituals, and other meaningful objects, although the way owners maintain these connections varies between individuals (Hughes & Harkin, 2025; Kogan et al., 2024).

These findings provide a key foundation for this project. A pet's passing is closely tied to the relationship the owner had built with the pet and their shared daily life, meaning that people may continue to remember their pets within these familiar contexts. This is reflected in Section 2.2.1, where the most frequently mentioned challenges are the loss of companionship and the difficulty of saying goodbye, while readjusting to daily life without a pet is considered a particularly difficult phase.

Benchmarking Products

Based on the themes identified in Section 1.2, Section 1.3 examines seven existing pet memorial products and compares their design approaches in terms of personalisation, commemorative content, interactivity, accessibility, and long-term use. These products embody a variety of design approaches, including the storage of ashes, the preservation of fur and paw prints, photographs, candle lighting, digital imagery, and outdoor memorial installations.

The comparison reveals that while existing products can preserve meaningful traces of pets, their strengths often stand in isolation. Some products establish strong personal emotional connections through fur, paw prints, or photographs, while others focus more on symbolic forms or atmosphere creation. Traditional urns and memorial plaques are primarily positioned in the mid-to-high-end market segment and are relatively uninnovative, whereas products offering more active or interactive forms of remembrance are relatively rare.

Primary Research

Section 2.2.1 made this market gap more specific from the user perspective. Personalisation is the most highly valued product priority among both participant groups, while meaningful keepsakes and home integration are equally important. At the same time, 51.3% of participants felt that current memorial products look too much like funeral goods; others described them as generic, lacking personality, or emotionally overwhelming.

The interviews in Section 2.2.2 provided several insights that are difficult to capture through a survey. Participants spoke of the importance of recognisable details, such as appearance, fur, paw prints, voices, and personal items. They also described how memorial items remain visible in the home and become part of daily life. Over time, these objects could bring back memories that had become less clear. Other issues also emerged, including regret around farewell, the idea of a memorial as a symbolic home, practical protection of ashes and interest in gentle forms of interaction.

3.2 Design Implications

The goal of this project is to develop a pet memorial product that supports meaningful remembrance after companion-animal loss. The design should feel personal to the individual pet, remain appropriate for everyday home environments, and provide owners with a gentle way to keep important memories or physical traces close over time.

Overall, the findings across Section 1.2 Background, Section 1.3 Benchmarking, and Sections 2.2.1–2.2.2 identify a gap between the emotional and personal needs of pet owners and many memorial products currently available. Background research showed that remembrance is highly individual and can continue through photographs, possessions, rituals and other meaningful objects. Benchmarking showed that existing products often address these needs separately, while the primary research placed particular value on personalisation, meaningful keepsakes and products that can remain naturally within the home.

Personal and Meaningful

The design should allow the memorial to feel connected to one specific pet. This may involve pet-specific memories or traces such as photographs, fur, paw prints, ashes, appearance or personal belongings, depending on what the owner chooses to preserve. The interviews showed that these recognisable details can carry meaning because they belong directly to the individual pet.

Part of Everyday Life

The memorial should be suitable for long-term display within ordinary domestic spaces. Survey and interview findings showed that remembrance often remains connected to familiar places and everyday routines, while many existing products were considered too funeral-like or emotionally heavy. The design should therefore feel calm and comfortable within the home while still clearly carrying personal meaning.

Emotional Comfort

The emotional experience of the product should also be considered. Section 2.2.1 found that 51.3% of participants felt current memorial products looked too much like funeral goods, while others described them as generic or emotionally heavy.

The design should therefore avoid an overly serious or funeral-like appearance. Form, material, light and interaction can be used in a softer way so that the product feels comfortable to keep nearby. It should allow the owner to engage with the memorial when they want to, without making interaction feel required.

3.2 Design Implications

MUST	SHOULD	MUST NOT
Reflect the identity of the individual pet through meaningful personalisation.	Allow gentle and optional interaction, such as touch, light or changing memories.	Look strongly associated with funeral or cemetery products.
Provide secure preservation or display of meaningful keepsakes and memories.	Allow owners to adapt or add personal elements over time.	Rely mainly on generic pet symbols or surface-level personalisation.
Fit naturally within everyday home environments and support long-term use.	Use calm forms, materials and sensory qualities that create a gentle emotional character.	Force emotional engagement or suggest that the product can remove or cure grief.

4.0 Conclusion

4.0 Conclusion

This research report identifies opportunities to improve support for coping with the loss of companion animals and ways to remember them in daily life. The findings indicate that the grief of pet loss persists through daily routines, familiar places, and personal memories, and that the ways people choose to commemorate their pets vary from person to person.

Section 1 explores the emotional experiences of pet loss, remembrance activities, and existing memorial practices, helping to clarify key issues and gaps in this field. Building on these findings, Section 2 conducts a more in-depth investigation through surveys and interviews, revealing the importance of personal emotional bonds, familiar memories, and memorial practices that can be naturally integrated into the home environment.

Section 3 synthesises these findings and identifies personal emotional connections, emotional comfort, and integration into daily life and the home environment as key directions for future development. Overall, this report provides a clear foundation for the further development of pet memorial practices, enabling them to better address the needs and experiences identified in the study.

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